



Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing

Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2022-2023

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked by Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA

Reference: Hearing on 14 November 2023, Annual Report of Community Services Directorate

In relation to: Youth Justice Policy and Services and Responses to Increased Recidivism

According to the Annual Report, recidivism rates 'are an indicator ... in particular whether interventions have been successful in assisting young people to exit the youth justice system' (p. 94). In 2021–22, four of 29 young people returned to the youth justice system after receiving a final court order (2022 AR, p. 103), but last year 12 of 48 young people returned (p. 94). This suggests that part of the explanation why so many young people entered the youth justice system last year is because more of them (both numerically but also as a percentage) were actually re-entering it. The Annual Report also states that the government will 'promote effective and evidence[-]based interventions that reduce re[-]offending' (p. 93).

1. Has the government identified any possible factors (other than 'the movement of this result is influenced by small numbers') as contributing to last year's increased youth recidivism? If so, what are these factors?
2. What evidence-based reforms to existing interventions is the government currently applying to help improve the youth recidivism rate?

Minister Davidson: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

1. Recidivism rates by young people on community-based orders is measured by the number of young people who were subject to more than one final supervised community-based order during the current and previous financial reporting year. Recidivism by young people in detention is measured by the number of young people who were subject to more than one sentence of detention in the current and previous financial reporting years.

In the 2021-22 ACT Budget, these 2 separate recidivism rates were combined into a single measure, including all returns to sentenced supervision. This means 2021-22 and 2022-23 results cannot be compared to earlier years and therefore trend data is not yet available for this measure. Further, the small numbers involved in sentenced supervision data may cause large fluctuations in the results.

Apart from the small numbers in ACT data, possible factors that may contribute to increased youth recidivism include the complex needs of young people in custody and limited opportunities for young people exiting custody to develop independence and life skills.

2. The next stage of youth justice reform will have a renewed focus on diversion from the justice system, including through implementing a new minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) for the ACT. This major reform will yield positive outcomes across the youth justice system, reducing the number of young people who come in contact with the system at an early age.

In the 2023-24 ACT Budget, the Government announced investment of \$10.4 million over 4 years for a suite of evidenced based early support and therapeutic services to support the legislative reform to raise the MACR. This will include funding for an ongoing Functional Family Therapy Youth Justice program, establishment of a Therapeutic Support Panel and intensive case management and support services for young people.

The ACT Government has also invested \$200,000 in the 2023-24 ACT Budget to co-design and develop a Throughcare program for youth justice. This critical work aims to reduce re-offending and recidivism at all stages of contact with the justice system.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing

Signature: 

Date: 28/11/23

By the Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Ms Emma Davidson MLA